

I Claim:

1 1. A method for enabling players to gamble directly with one another, comprising the steps  
2 of:

3 a) for each player, receiving at a host server a bet conveyed from a machine  
4 connected to the host server through a distributed network;

5 b) combining the received bets from a set of players into a pot;

6 c) commencing a hosted game among the set of players by prompting the players at  
7 their respective machines for inputs;

8 d) receiving the inputs at the host server;

9 e) selecting at least one winner of the hosted game from among the set of players  
10 based on the received inputs; and

11 f) allocating the pot of the hosted game to the at least one winner in accordance with  
12 prescribed rules.

1 2. The method as in claim 1, wherein there is one winner and wherein the allocating step  
2 comprises crediting said one winner with the pot.

1 3. The method as in claim 2, including the additional step, prior to the allocating step, of  
2 deducting a commission from the pot.

- 1 4. The method as in claim 1, wherein each bet received at the host server comprises an  
2 authorization to charge or credit a designated account of a respective player.
- 1 5. The method as in claim 1, wherein each of the players in the set of players has agreed to  
2 bet the same amount of money to participate in the hosted game.
- 1 6. The method as in claim 1, including the additional step of notifying the set of players in  
2 the hosted game of the at least one winner.
- 3 7. The method as in claim 6, wherein each bet received at the host server comprises an  
4 authorization to charge or credit a designated account of a respective player, and wherein  
5 the notifying step further includes notifying each player of any charges or credits to a  
6 respective designated account.
- 1 8. The method as in claim 1, including the additional step, after the allocating step, of  
2 prompting each player to play again against the other players in the set of players.
- 1 9. The method as in claim 8, including the additional steps of repeating steps (a) through (f).
- 1 10. The method as in claim 1, wherein the hosted game is a pick-a-number game and wherein  
2 the inputs received at the host server is at least one number from each player.

1 11. The method as in claim 10, including the additional step of generating a random or  
2 pseudorandom number at the host server, and wherein the selecting step comprises:  
3 comparing the numbers provided by each player to number generated at the host  
4 server for a match, and  
5 selecting as the at least one winner any player who input a matching number.

1 12. The method as in claim 11, wherein, in the event that two or more players input a  
2 matching number, steps (c) through (e) are repeated for each player that input the  
3 matching number prior to the allocating step.

1 13. The method as in claim 10, including the additional step of generating a random or  
2 pseudorandom number at the host server, and wherein the selecting step comprises:  
3 calculating a difference between the number provided by each player and the  
4 number generated at the host server, and  
5 selecting as the at least one winner the player whose calculated difference is a  
6 minimum.

1 14. The method as in claim 13, wherein the selected step excludes any player in the set of  
2 players that provided a number which is greater than the number generated by the host  
3 server.

- 1 15. The method as in claim 13, wherein the selecting step excludes any player in the set of  
2 players that provided a number which is less than the number generated by the host  
3 server.
- 1 16. The method as in claim 13, wherein a prescribed number of additional winners are  
2 selected in order of increasing calculated differences from said minimum calculated  
3 difference.
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1 17. The method as in claim 1, wherein each player has a respective a list of buddies  
associated therewith, and wherein each player is apprized as to which, if any, of his or her  
associated buddies are presently connected to the host server.
- 2 18. The method as in claim 17, wherein one player can challenge a buddy from his or her  
buddy list to participate in the hosted game by having an electronic message conveyed to  
3 that buddy.
- 1 19. The method as in claim 18, wherein the electronic message is an instant message  
2 conveyed from said one player's machine to the machine of the challenged buddy.
- 1 20. The method as in claim 1, including the additional step of rating each player by skill level  
2 and wherein each of the players in the set of players differs in skill level by at most a  
3 prescribed amount.

1 21. The method as in claim 20, wherein each of the players in the set of players has the same  
2 skill level.

1 22. The method as in claim 20, wherein the rating step comprises utilizing information in a  
2 database concerning at least each player's prior performance in one or more hosted  
3 games.

23. The method as in claim 20, wherein the rating step comprises posting a series of  
questions to each player and gauging the correctness of the responses provided by each  
player.

24. The method as in claim 1, including the additional steps of:  
permitting multiple potential players to chat in a chat room made available by the  
host server, and

enabling the potential players to select a hosted game in which to participate  
together,

whereby the players choose the members of the set of players for the hosted game.

1 25. The method as in claim 1, wherein the host server conveys to each player's machine a  
2 personal Web page which includes statistics concerning that player's performance.

1 26. A method for enabling teams of players to compete directly against each other for money,  
2 comprising the steps of:

- 3 a) establishing at least a first team and a second team, the teams including non-  
4 overlapping sets of players each of which is connected by a machine to a host  
5 server through a distributed network;
- 6 b) receiving at the host server an ante conveyed from each player's machine;
- 7 b) combining the antes from all of the players into a pot;
- 8 c) commencing a hosted game among the teams by prompting the players of each  
9 team at their respective machines for inputs;
- 10 d) receiving the inputs at the host server;
- 11 e) selecting at least one winning team from among the teams based on the received  
12 inputs; and
- 13 f) allocating the pot of the hosted game to the at least one winning team in  
14 accordance with prescribed rules.

1 27. The method as in claim 26, wherein the first input received from a player on a given team  
2 in response to a particular prompt is registered at the host server and wherein the selecting  
3 step is based upon the registered inputs.